OAUDUN AND HIS WHITE BEAR.

(FROM THE OLD NORSE.)

[The following quaint story, of the adventures of an Icelander in the eleventh century, is taken from the Saga of King Harold Sigardson. This was that Norwegian king, whose hard unyielding temper gained him the nickname of Hardrada "Hardredc." He was St. Olof's brother, after whose death he fled East to Byzantium and became captain of the Greek Emperor's Varangians. Returning after several years he found Magnus, Olof's son, on the Norwegian throne, a share of which he claimed and got. At the death of his nephew he became sole king of Norway, and at last, having taken up the cause of Tostig, he fell at the battle of Stamford Bridge in Yorkshire, in 1066, and found there those seven feet of English ground which his namesake the Anglo-Saxon Harold had promised him. Sweyn, whose bounty comes out so characteristically in the story, was that King Sweyn of Denmark, who

claimed the crown of England from Edward the Confessor as Canute's heir, and whose death by falling overboard when on the eve of embarking for England to assert his right, may still be seen sculptured as one of God's judgments in the Chapel of the Confessor at the back of the High Altar in Westminster Abbey.]

There was a man named Audun, an Icelander and Westfirther; his means were small, but his goodness was well known. This Audun once sailed from Iceland with a Norseman whose name was Thorir, but before he went he made over almost all his goods to his mother, and after all it was not more than enough to keep her for two years. After that they put to sea with a fair breeze, and soon made Norway. Audun stayed with Thorir that winter, and next summer they both sailed out to Greenland, and were there the next winter. There Audun bought a white bear well tamed, and he gave for the beast all the money he had, — for it was the greatest treasure of a bear that had ever been heard of.

Next summer they sailed back to Norway, and had a good voyage; as for Thorir, the captain, he went back to his own house; but Audun got himself a passage east to Wick in the Cattegat, and took his bear with him, and looked about for a lodging while he stayed there, for he meant to make his way south to Denmark, and give the bear to King Sweyn. But just then the war and strife between King Harold and Sweyn was at its height. It happened, too, that Harold was then in the town whither Audun came, and he soon heard how an Icelander had come from Greenland with such a tame white bear. The king sent at onoe for Audun, so he went

before the king and greeted him. The king took his words well, and asked:

"Hast thou that white bear which is such a treasure?"

"I have," said Audun.

The king said:

"Wilt thou sell us the beast for the same price thou gavest for it? "

" I will not do that, lord," said Audun.

" Wilt thou," says the king, " that I give thee twice as much, and that is fairer, if indeed thou gavest for it all thy money."

" I will not do that, lord," he said.

" Wilt thou give it me, then? " says the king.

" That, too, I will not do," says the Icelander.

" What wilt thou do with it, then? " said the king.

Audun answers, " What I have already made up my mind to do; go south to Denmark and give it to King Sweyn."

Then King Harold said:

"Is it now that thou art so ignorant a man that thou hast not heard of all this war and strife which is between the lands here, or dost thou think thy luck so great that thou wilt be able to bring this treasure to King Sweyn when others cannot get to his land without trouble, even when need forces them to go."

Audun answers:

"Lord, this now lies in your power, but I will say yes to no other way than the one I have already spoken of, and made up my mind to follow."

Then the king said:

"I see no reason why thou shouldst not go as thou pleasest, but I make this bargain that thou comest here to me when thou gettest back, and tell me how King Sweyn rewarded thee for the beast. May be thou art a man of luck."

" I'll give you my word to do that," said Audim. And away he went, and got a passage south to Denmark. But when he got there every penny of his money was spent, and he had to beg for food both for his bear and himself. So he went to a bailiff of the king, whose name was Auki, and begged him to get him some food, that he might feed himself and the bear, which he meant to give to King Sweyn.

Auki answers:

"I will sell thee food, if thou wilt."

"I have nothing to give for it now," said Audun; "but I would be glad to hit upon some way of bringing the beast to the king, for it were a great scathe if so precious a thing were to die on my hands."

Auki said:

"Ye'll both of you need much food before ye get to the king. And now I'll make you this offer : I will feed ye both till then, but then I must have half the beast; and what thou hast now to look at is this — that thou wilt not have even half of it if it starves to death on your hands."

Audun thought this choice hard, but still could see nothing better for it as things stood; so they struck a bargain, and he agreed to sell Auki half the bear, on condition that they started for where the king was at once, and should reckon the worth on both sides, first on the food which Auki gave him and then of the beast; and that Auki should pay Audun so much as was over, if the king thought half the bear worth more than the food. So they went both of them till they found King Sweyn. He greeted Auki, the bailiff, well, but asked the man who came with him who he was, for he did not know him.

Audun answers:

"I am a man from Iceland, new come from Norway, but before that I came from Greenland. My errand hither was to give you this white

bear, which I bought out there in Greenland with all my goods; but a great change has befallen me, for now I own no more than half the beast."

After that he told the king the whole story, and all that passed between him and AukiThen the king said:

"Is this true, Auki, what he says?"

"True it is," says Auki.

Then the king said:

"And thoughtest thou it fell to thee, when I had set thee over my goods and given thee great place, to tax and toll what an outlander and a stranger had undertaken to bring me as a treasure — who gave for it all his goods, and that too when our greatest foes thought it good to let him go on his way in peace? Think, now, how truthless it was in thee to do such a thing, and see what a great difference there is between thee and Harold, when he gave him safe conduct. And now it were meet thou shouldst lose, not only all thy goods, but thy life also; and though I will not slay thee this time, still thou shalt go away at once on the spot a beggar from my realm, and never come more unto my sight. But for thee, Icelander, as thou hast given me the whole of the beast, and that worth far more than the food which Auki sold, but which he ought to have given thee, I accept it, and ask thee to stay here with me."

Then Audun thanked the king for his words and invitation, and

stayed there awhile, but Auki went away unhappy, and lost great goods because he coveted that which did not belong to him.Audun had only been with King Sweyn a little while when he said he was eager to go away. The king was rather slow in answering him.

"What wilt thou do, then?" he asked, "if thou wilt not be with us?"

" I will go south to Rome," he says.

Then the king said:

"Hadst thou not taken such good counsel, I had been very angry at thy eagerness to go away, but now thou shalt not be thwarted in the least." So the king gave him much silver, and settled all about his journey, and put him in the way of going in company with other pilgrims, and bade him to come to see him when he came back.

So Audun went south; but when he was coming back he took a great sickness and lay long abed. All the money was spent which Sweyn had given him, and his companions went on and left him. At last he rose from his sickness, and was quite thin and weak, nor had he a penny to buy food. Then he took a beggar's wandering, and went along begging his food, till he came back to Denmark about Easter, to a town where King Sweyn happened to be. By this time Audun had his hair close cropped and scarce a rag to his back, vile and poor in every way; and so he dared not show himself among the throng of men. He hung about the cloisters of the church, and thought to choose his time to meet the king when he went to Nones; but when he saw the king coming and his train so bravely

dressed, he was ashamed to show himself before their eyes. But when the king had sat down to the board, Audun went and took his meat outside under the wall of the hall, as is pilgrims wont, so long as they have not thrown away staff and scrip. And now he made up his mind to throw himself in the king's way as he went to even-song; but, so bold as this seemed to him earlier in the day, just half as bold again must he have been to let the king see him now that they had well drunk. So, when Audun saw them coming, he turned short off and ran away to hide himself. But the king thought he caught a glimpse of a man, and as he came out of church, and all his train had come inside their lodging, he turned round and went out again, and called out with a loud voice as soon as he was out of doors:

"If there be any man near here, as methinks there is, who wishes to see me, and has hardly heart to do so, let him come forward now and let himself be seen.

"Then Audun came forward, and fell at the king's feet. The king knew him at once, and took him by the hand and bade him welcome. "And now," he says, "thou art greatly changed since we saw one another last, for I scarce knew thee!"

So the king led him into the hall there and then; but all the king's train laughed at Audun as soon as they saw him. But the king said: "Ye have no need to laugh at him, vile and mean though he seems to ye to look on; he hath looked better for his soul's health than ye, and therefore to God's eye he will seem bright and fair."

Then the king made them get ready a bath, and waited on him with his own hands, and gave him afterwards good clothes, and made much of him in every way. So Audun soon got back his strength and health, for he was young in years, and there he stayed awhile. He knew, too, how to behave himself among the crowd of men; he was an easy-tempered, word-weighing man, and not given to gossip. So all men liked him, and as for King Sweyn he was most gracious to him. So it fell out one day, when springtide was drawing on, that they two were talking together, and all at once the king

said:

"Sooth to say, Audun, I have never yet repaid thee in a way thou wouldest like by a gift in return for the white bear. And now, if thou wilt, thou shalt be free to stay long here with me, and I will make thee my henchman; and, at the same time, treat thee honourably in all things."

Audun answers,

"God thank you, lord, for your generous offer, and for all the honour you show me, but I have set my heart on sailing out to Iceland."

"This seems to me a most wonderful choice," said the king.Then Audun said, "I can't bear to think that I am sitting here with you in great honour and happiness, while my mother tramps about on the beggar's path out yonder in Iceland; for now the time is up, during which I gave her means to live, before I sailed away from home."

"Spoken like a good man and true," answers the king, "and no doubt thou wilt be a man of luck.This was the only thing which would not have misliked me, if thou hadst asked leave to go away. But now stay here awhile with me, till the ships are being got ready."

So Audun stayed. But, one day, when the Spring was near at hand. King Sweyn went down from the town to the landing-place, and then they saw men busy fitting out their ships for various lands:

East to Russia, or to Saxony, to Sweden, or to Norway. So Audun and the king came to a fair ship, and men were hard at work on her : she was a merchantman of fine size.Then the king said,

"What thinkest thou, Audun, of this ship? "

He said, "She was fine enough."

"Now," said the king, " I will repay thee for the bear, and give thee this ship with a full lading of all that I know is handiest in Iceland. "Audun thanked the king as well as he could, for this gift; but when time went on, and the ship was ready for sea, they two went down again to the strand. King Sweyn and Audun. Then the king spoke:

"Since thou wilt go away from me, Icelander, nothing shall now be done to hinder thee; but I have heard tell that your land is ill off for havens, and that there are great shoals and risks for ships; and now, if things do not turn out well, it may be that thy ship goes to pieces, and thy lading will be lost, little then will be left to show that thou hast met King Sweyn, and given him a thing of great price." As he said this, the king put into his hand a big leathern bag full of silver, and said: "Thou wilt not be now altogether penniless, though thy ship goes to pieces, if thou only holdest this."

"May be, too," the king went on to say, "that thou losest this money also, what good will it then have been to thee that thou gavest King Sweyn thy treasure? "As he said this, the king drew a ring of goldfrom his arm, and gave it to Audun; that was a tiling of costly price, and the king went on:" Though things go so ill, that thy

ship goes to pieces, and all thy goods and money be lost, still thou wilt not be penniless, if thou comest to land with this ring, for it is often the wont of men to bear their gold about them, when they are in risk of shipwreck, and so it will be seen that thou hast met King Sweyn Wolfson, if thou holdest fast the ring, though thou losest the rest of thy goods. And now I will give thee this bit of advice, never to part with this ring, for I wish thee to enjoy it to the uttermost, unless thou thinkest thyself bound to repay so much goodness to some great man as to deem it right that thou shouldest give him a great I treasure. When thou findest such a one give him the ring, for it is worth a great man's while to own it; and, now, farewell, and luck follow thy voyage." That was what King Sweyn said.

After that Audun put to sea, and ran into a Haven in Norway, and as soon as he heard where I King Harold was he set out to find him, as he had given his word. So Audun came before King Harold and greeted him, and the king took his greeting kindly." Sit here now and drink with us," said the king.

So Audun sat and drank. Then King Harold asked,

"Well, how did King Sweyn repay thee for the white bear? "

"In that wise, lord," says Audun, "that he took it when I gave it."

" In that wise I had repaid thee myself," says the king. "What more did he give thee? "

"He gave me silver to go south."

The king answers: "King Sweyn has given many a man before now silver to go south, or to help his need, though he had not brought him things of price. What hast thou more to say?"

"He asked me," answers Audun, "to become his henchman, and to give me great honour if I stayed with him."

"That was well spoken," says the king; "but he must have repaid thee with more still."

Audun said:

"He gave me a big merchantman, full laden with the best of freight."

"That was a noble gift," says the king, "but I would have given thee as much; or did he give thee anything more? "

Audun answers:

"He gave me besides, a leathern bag full of silver, and said I would not then be penniless if I held fast to it, though my ship went to pieces off Iceland."

"That was nobly thought of," answers the king, "and that I would not have done. I should have thought myself free if I had given thee ship and lading. Gave he ought besides?"

"Yes, lord, he did," says Audun: "he gave me this ring which I have on my arm, and said it might so happen that I lost all my goods and the ship too, and yet he said I should not be penniless if I still had the ring. He bade me also not to part with the ring unless I thought that I owed so much to some great man for his goodness that I ought to give it him; but now I have found that man, for it was in your choice, lord, to take my bear from me, and my life too, but you let me go in peace to Denmark when no one else could get thither."

The king took the ring blithely, and gave Audun good gifts in return before they parted. So Audun sailed to Iceland that very summer, and all thought him the luckiest of men.

G. W. Dasent.

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